



Class Society and the State

V I Lenin wrote "The State and Revolution" between the February 1917 bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia, and the October 1917 proletarian revolution. The October Revolution dramatically interrupted his writing, leaving the work unfinished. [Picture: Lenin in 1917]

SACP 1st Deputy General Secretary Jeremy Cronin once remarked that South Africa is in some ways stuck “between February and October”, meaning to compare our SA situation during the (now) 21 years since 1994, with the eight months in 1917 between the two Russian revolutions.

This is one reason why it is worthwhile to run all six chapters of “The State and Revolution” as a course, set or series of the Communist University. In length, they are well suited to the purpose. It is more than likely that this kind of treatment, and this way of collective study, was exactly what Lenin had in mind when he wrote the work. He referred to it as a “pamphlet”, which would tend to mean a text for mass agitational propaganda.

The urgency of Lenin’s revolutionary purpose is apparent from the first paragraph, as is the priority that he gives to the understanding of The State as a product of, and integral to, the exploitative class-divided social system that the Bolsheviks were determined to overthrow.

Hence the first words are a definition and a challenge to those who would think otherwise: *“The State: a Product of the Irreconcilability of Class Antagonisms”*

In the first paragraph Lenin refers to the embracing of “Marxism” by the respectable bourgeoisie, and their pleasure at the amenability of *“the labour unions which are so splendidly organized for the purpose of waging a predatory war!”*

The great 1914-1918 war that was raging at the time was more than an incidental background to the Russian Revolutions of 1917. Like the lethal global neo-liberalism of recent times, the “First World War” (the Imperialist war) had seduced the major

part of the social-democratic organisations that claimed to represent the working class. The structures of the working class had turned against the working class, and the crux of the matter, then as now, was The State. Lenin is unequivocal:

“The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.”

Lenin proceeds to write that the overthrow of the bourgeois state has to be direct and forcible, whereas the withering-away of the proletarian state can only be the indirect consequence of the progressive disappearance of class antagonism during the transitional period called socialism.

"The State and Revolution" goes to the heart of the revolutionary theory of class struggle, sharpens all contradictions, and draws clear lessons that are still relevant today, especially for South Africa.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [State and Revolution, C1, Class Society and State, Lenin, 1917.](#)
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